

## Silent but Deadly: The Truth About Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

### What is carbon monoxide?

Carbon monoxide, or CO, is an odorless, colorless gas most commonly produced in households by power generators, car exhaust and fuel-burning appliances (furnaces, water heaters, space heaters, etc.). It is very hard to detect and causes more than 500 Americans to die from unintentional CO poisoning each year.<sup>1</sup>

### What are the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning?

The symptoms are very similar to illnesses like the common cold or flu without the onset of fever. A moderate amount of CO in the air could cause headache, fatigue, dizziness and nausea. Higher levels of CO may also cause mental confusion, vomiting and loss of muscular coordination.<sup>2</sup> If any of these symptoms persist and they suddenly affect more than one person in the area, immediately move outside to fresh air. You could lose consciousness and even die.

### How can I prevent carbon monoxide poisoning?

While carbon monoxide is virtually unrecognizable to the human senses, it is detectable and preventable by following a few precautionary measures:

- Have your fuel-burning appliances and chimney inspected and serviced annually by a professional to make certain CO leakages will not occur and they are in proper working order.
- Install CO alarms in the open airways of your home. Change the batteries and test the alarm twice a year.
- Never leave a car or truck running in a garage even if you feel there is ample ventilation.
- Don't operate a portable generator or any other gasoline engine-powered tool in or around any enclosed building.
- Don't ever use a gas oven, range or clothes dryer to heat your home.
- Never use an unvented gas or kerosene heater space heater to in your home.
- Follow manufacturer specifications to properly vent gas appliances in closed spaces such as your home, building or trailer.
- Don't use charcoal in an enclosed space or burn anything in a stove or fireplace that is not vented.

The key to preventing carbon monoxide poisoning is education about the symptoms and all of the potential hazards in your home. If someone experiences symptoms retreat to fresh air immediately and call 911 or go to an emergency room.

For more information about how to protect you or your family from carbon monoxide poisoning, visit the Carbon Monoxide section of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at [www.cdc.gov/co](http://www.cdc.gov/co).

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<sup>1</sup> Center for Disease Control: *Carbon Monoxide Poisoning* (<http://www.cdc.gov/co>)

<sup>2</sup> Consumer Product Safety Commission : *Carbon Monoxide Questions and Answers* (<http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/466.html>)